

CC's Weekly Subject Indexes Can Help You Complete the Incomplete in References, Bibliographies and Journal Coverage

September 29, 1975

Number 39

In this issue you will find a *Weekly Subject Index (WSI)*. We tried this experiment last week. This will not surprise those who already subscribe to *WSI*. But even subscribers may be interested in some new ideas on ways to make use of *WSI* as effective as possible.

Many readers enjoy scanning one or more editions of *Current Contents*[®] cover-to-cover every week. But that does not mean that the *WSI* can't be useful. At ISI[®] we do what is reasonable to make each and every contents page easy to scan. In some cases, we do a better job than the journal itself--otherwise we wouldn't change it.

Nevertheless, there are many things that may cause you to overlook pertinent titles. Perhaps some synonym or other variant of a key word is missed in haste. If you read *CC*[®] on the way to work, a moment's distraction or any of myriad possible interruptions may cause you to miss some possibly relevant title. So, even if you scan *CC* cover-to-cover, using *WSI* as well provides insurance against missing articles of importance. Before or after scanning the issue, a quick check of key words in the *Weekly Subject Index* is pretty good assurance that you haven't missed anything significant.

There are *CC* readers who don't scan every issue from cover-to-cover.

We all have a week when there just isn't time to scan the entire issue, much less the three or four that may have accumulated during a vacation or a business trip. *WSI* really pays its way then. You can locate those articles with obvious relevance to your work without scanning by checking a list of key words. If you're an inveterate scanner like me, you may then set the issues aside for later browsing.

For some inveterate scanners, it may be impossible to set the issue aside. *CC* readers who most often feel this crunch are those who share a department copy of *Current Contents*. It has to be passed along. A few minutes with *WSI* can alert them to articles listed in *CC* that otherwise they might neglect.

If you haven't time or inclination to scan either *CC* or *WSI*, *WSI* can still serve as the key for a personal system for SDI (selective dissemination of information). Prepare a profile list of key words or authors for an assistant. He or she can check *WSI* every week, locate the articles and mark the *CC* pages for you.

WSI's time-saving also makes it practical to consider a second edition of *CC* for your personal or department use. Many *CC* readers do research on highly interdisciplinary topics. Articles of interest can appear in two or more editions of *CC*. Only 15% of the nearly 4700 journals

covered by the various editions of *Current Contents* appear in more than one edition. Of these 600 journals, the vast majority appear in only two. *WSI* makes it possible to scan one *CC* edition and rely on key words for information from others—significantly increasing the number of journals you cover, without significantly increasing the time you spend on information retrieval.

The *Weekly Subject Index* has other uses too. It can help subscribers locate current articles when, for one reason or another, they have an incomplete reference—especially a mangled version of the title. That often happens when colleagues mention articles in passing.

The source of the incomplete information may not be a colleague. It's by no means rare nowadays that a scientific report, or 'information' about it, finds its way into the popular press. Although the reference may be incomplete or garbled, a title or subject-word or the author's name can usually lead you to the article in a recent issue of *CC*.

For an author completing a manuscript for publication, *WSI* seems to me frankly indispensable. As current as *CC* itself, there is no other index that will give you the up-to-the-minute 'retrospective' search that any author wants, or should want. For this type of final check, it may be necessary to go through a half dozen or more issues of *CC*.

For any extensive retrospective search, it's more sensible to use the *Permuterm® Subject Index (PSI)* of either the *Science Citation Index® (SCI®)* or the *Social Sciences Citation Index® (SSCI®)*.

Readers already familiar with the *Weekly Subject Index* will find that the *PSI* is also easy to use. Like *WSI*,

the *Permuterm Subject Index* is a 'natural-language' index that uses title-words as its main entries. In *PSI*, however, all these main entries have subentries that we call *co-terms*. The *co-terms* or subentries are all the other significant words from the same title. This pairing of words from titles saves the user's time when faced with searching a larger time-chunk of the literature. For example, in the *Weekly Subject Index* you can look up *CHLOROPLASTS(S)* and find a list that's short enough to allow turning back to every article title referenced.

But in *PSI*, the list of references under *CHLOROPLAST(S)* will be much longer. In the 1974 *PSI* Annual there are almost 2000 references to titles that used the word. The references are grouped by *co-terms* too diverse to list here. The most common *co-term* pairing is with words like *Chlamydomonas*, *chlorophyll*, *cystoplasmic*, *DNA*, *fluorescence*, *isolated*, *membranes*, *photosynthesis*, *proteins*, etc.

The *Permuterm Subject Index* provides a quarterly or triannual and annual cumulations of the material covered in most *CC* editions. Obviously *PSI* covers much more than any individual *CC* edition does. All of this does bring up the reasonable question—why not monthly, quarterly or annual cumulations of each *CC*'s subject indexes? We've been studying that possibility for some time, especially for fields like agriculture and environmental science, where we know a large number of readers depend upon two *CC* editions. But that's the subject of another essay. Try *WSI*—we think you'll like it.